

Urgency Needed to Stop Iran's Nuclear Program

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Mr. Speaker, Iran's nuclear program is progressing at a rapid pace, and absent swift action, Iran could soon build a nuclear bomb, putting the United States, Israel, and the entire Middle East at risk. The need for Congress to pass strong and comprehensive sanctions against Iran is urgent.

Iran currently possesses enough low-enriched uranium to produce two nuclear weapons upon further enrichment. Last month, Iran began enriching the stockpile of low-enriched uranium to a level of 20 percent under the guise of needing more highly enriched uranium for medical purposes; yet the truth is that Iran lacks the technical know-how to turn 20 percent enriched uranium into fuel rods needed to produce medical isotopes.

Rather than meeting its medical needs, this step only puts Iran that much closer to having weapons-grade fuel that could be turned into a nuclear weapon. In fact, nuclear experts say this level of enrichment represents 85 to 90 percent of the work needed to produce weapons-grade fuel. Allowed to continue on this course, Iran could potentially complete the enrichment process in a few months at a small facility, according to former IAEA action team member and physicist David Albright.

The IAEA has also recently raised new concerns about the military nature of Iran's nuclear program. In February, the U.N. nuclear watchdog agency issued a report that said Iran may be working to develop a nuclear-armed missile, adding further evidence that Iran's nuclear work is not for peaceful purposes.

If Iran is successful in building a nuclear weapon and fitting it into a missile, the entire region will be at risk. Iran already has missiles with a range of more than 1,200 miles, which puts Israel, Iraq, Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Egypt, and the Ukraine and many other countries within striking distance.

Advancements in Iranian technology threaten nations further away from Iran as well. Iran has launched a satellite into space, demonstrating that it has the technical capability that may allow it to build ballistic missiles capable of hitting American cities.

While nuclear proliferation is dangerous in any context, there is greater reason to be gravely concerned about a nuclear-armed Iran. For years, Iran has fought American presence in the Middle East and has supported terrorist groups that have targeted and killed American troops. For example, American officials believe Iran supported the group behind the 1996 terrorist attack on a U.S. military residence in Saudi Arabia that killed 19 of our servicemen. A nuclear-armed Iran would surely put American troops serving in the Middle East today at even greater risk.

In addition, Iran's leaders frequently speak of a world without Israel. The Iranian President has called for Israel to be ``wiped off the map." If Iran gets a nuclear weapon, its leader will have the capability to do these hateful, destructive things that they speak of.

Americans and Israelis around the world would also be at likely greater risk of a terrorist attack if Iran obtains the bomb. Iran is already the leading state sponsor of terrorism, funneling money, weapons, and training to terrorist groups, including Hezbollah, Hamas, and other terrorist organizations. These groups have goals and ideologies inconsistent with our American values. Emboldened by a nuclear-armed Iran, they may launch even more frequent and deadly attacks on innocent civilians.

Clearly, the consequences of a nuclear-armed Iran are intolerable. To stop Iran's drive to a nuclear weapon, we must act now and we must act decisively. The House of Representatives and the Senate have both passed legislation to impose strong and comprehensive sanctions on Iran. The Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act and the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act target Iran's reliance on foreign suppliers to meet its fuel needs. Although Iran sits on top of a wealth of oil and natural gas, it lacks the ability to turn much of that oil into gasoline. Consequently, Iran imports 40 percent of its gasoline needs.

The Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act and the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act offer the best prospect of compelling Iran to give up its pursuit of nuclear weapons. Congressional leaders must quickly resolve the differences between the House and Senate versions of these bills while keeping the teeth of the sanctions intact so the President can sign a final bill into law.

At the same time, the administration and like-minded allies should impose multilateral sanctions now while also pressing reluctant nations to agree to strong and comprehensive sanctions at the United Nations. The administration must also enforce current law and levy sanctions against companies that violate our laws.

Time is not on our side. The sooner strong and comprehensive sanctions are applied on Iran the greater chance we have of preventing a nuclear-armed Iran, saving the lives of many, and enhancing the security of our own and that of our allies in the region.